

"Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow"



Bishops Down Primary School

www.bishopsdownprimary.org

Policy for Governor Visits

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Reviewed and updated by:

Strategy Committee

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Policy for Governor visits

The governing body has a statutory duty to oversee the policies and direction of the school, to monitor its standards and be held to account for its conduct and performance. Visiting the school is not a statutory requirement but they can be extremely important to learn how it functions, and to keep under review how it operates so that you can increase the governing body’s first hand knowledge, informing self evaluation and strategic decision making. It is recognised that the amount of time that a governor can commit to a visit will vary but in general governors should expect to make at least one or more visits per year.

Governors Visits should generally align to the priorities determined on the School Development Plan so that the governing body can monitor how these are progressing. The governing body should develop a plan of visits throughout the year to cover a wide range of school work and each visit should be agreed and have a clear purpose. Governors should arrange their visits with a member of the leadership team.

Purposes of a visit

Governors:

- To recognise and celebrate success
- To get to know the staff
- To show themselves as part of the school
- To improve knowledge of the school, its staff, needs, priorities, strengths and weaknesses
- To monitor and assess the priorities outlined in the School Development Plan and observe policies in action
- To assist the governing body in fulfilling its statutory duties and demonstrate their role as critical friend
- To develop an understanding of issues facing the school to inform decision making
- To understand the environment in which teachers teach
- To find out what resources are needed and prioritise them
- To ensure governors understand the reality of the classroom

Teachers:

- To get to know governors
- To understand better the governors’ roles and responsibilities
- To have an opportunity to reflect on practice through discussion
- To highlight the need for particular resources

What a visit is not about

- A form of inspection to make judgements about professional expertise of the teacher
- Checking on progress of own children
- Pursuing personal agenda
- Monopolising school/teacher time

How to feed back after the visit

Governors should feedback in writing to the SLT in the first instance. The report should then be shared with the team leader and the relevant governor committee. Reports to the governing body should not identify individuals in a critical manner, this is not the role of the governor. Feedback should include positive and supportive comments, any areas of concern, questions and constructive suggestions for development.

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Annual programme of visits

A flexible programme of visits should be agreed with the team leader. Governors should aim to spend the equivalent of a day in school per year in addition to attendance at one or two planned team meetings. The team leader will invite governors to any of the regular team meetings.

Visits can take the form of

- Meetings with staff
- Pupil interviews
- Looking at pupils work
- Meeting with staff groups
- Reviewing areas and resources of the school
- School evaluation tasks e.g. carrying out surveys, assessing SDP progress etc.

Visit Focus

Visits should be arranged which focus on the School Development Plan priorities to inform on progress. Visits **must include** a brief discussion about the Single Equality Scheme and an impact assessment of the relevant policy regarding equality. The following questions will be asked, ‘what have we found out?’ and ‘what will we do about it?’

Although not an exhaustive list visits may focus on:-

- Particular subjects, key stages or classes
- The use made of the buildings or the site
- The condition and maintenance of the premises
- Additional educational needs
- Literacy and numeracy
- Lunch and break times
- The use and condition of resources e.g. furniture or ICT equipment
- Deployment of staff, e.g. caretaker, office staff, teaching assistants
- The impact on the school of any changes e.g. reduced classes in a key stage
- Relative numbers of questions and responses to the teacher from boys to girls

Informal Visits

Visits may also take place in an informal capacity. ‘Discreet’ information can be gathered on these visits which build on your knowledge of the school. It is vital that everyone is clear about the capacity in which they are visiting and not to confuse the role. For example:

- The chair making a regular visit to see the headteacher
- To lend a helping hand with a school event
- To get information from the office relating to a committee meeting
- To help in a class
- Attending a school function or educational visit

Preparing for a visit

- Check the agreed policy for governors’ visits.
- Clarify the purpose of the visit. Is it linked to the School Development Plan? What are the relevant school policies? How does this determine the activities I am interested in?
- Discuss the agenda with the team leader well in advance and seek approval for your visit and agree a date that is suitable.
- Look at the prompts at the end of this document, including suggested questions.

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- Discuss the proposed agenda with the staff involved. How do they want governors to integrate into the lesson? Would note taking be allowed? It might be possible for you to see a copy of the lesson plan beforehand.
- Be clear beforehand exactly what you are observing. Try to prepare questions for staff in advance. The teacher may be able to guide you on this.
- Discuss with the SLT/class teacher if any supporting information is available – Ofsted report, improvement plan, performance data.
- Ensure that you are familiar with health and safety procedures

During the Visit

- Remember you are making the visit on behalf of the governing body, it is not appropriate to make judgements or promises on behalf of the governing body.
- Be punctual, keep to the agreed timetable but be flexible.
- Remember you are there to learn, it is a visit not an inspection. Dress ‘smart casual’ so as not to be intimidating
- Decide with the teacher how you will be introduced and what your role in the classroom will be.
- Get involved with the children if the teacher has agreed that this would be appropriate.
- Observe discretely. Remember that excessive note taking can be disconcerting and may make your visit look like an inspection.
- Don’t distract the teacher during the lesson from his/her work but be prepared to talk and show interest.
- Listen to staff and pupils, be courteous, friendly not critical.
- Interact, don’t interrupt.
- Remember why you are there. Don’t lose sight of the purpose of your visit.

After the visit

- Refer to the purpose of the visit. Consider together whether it has been achieved.
- Discuss what you have observed with the teacher. Use the opportunity to clarify any issue you are unclear about. For example, did your presence have any impact on the atmosphere in the classroom? If so, how?
- Thank the teacher for supporting you in your role as a governor. Be open, honest, and positive.
- Make notes as soon as possible after your observation while it is still fresh in your mind. Complete the agreed visit proforma, once you have shared and agreed this with the headteacher pass to the clerk for circulation to the governing body.
- Discuss your observations with the SLT. Be prepared to take the comments of others on board.
- Agree with the SLT how and when you will report on your visit to the governing body.
- Reflect: how did that go? has the visit enhanced relationships? have I learned more about the school? have I helped the governing body fulfil its duties?

Reporting your visit

- Write a short summary ‘as a lay governor’ of what you learned during the visit and the overall impression that was made. This will be easier if the visit had a focus.
- It would be polite to circulate a draft to the SLT and any staff involved as soon as possible after the visit for them to check the accuracy and clarity. Be prepared to amend it. Aim to achieve a report that is agreed by those involved.
- Send the report to the clerk for circulation to the next appropriate committee/governing body meeting.

Monitoring and review of school visit policy

Are our visits achieving the potential benefits we identified?
Have there been any unexpected benefits?
How can we make our practice even better?

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Bishops Down Primary School Record form for a governor’s school visit

NAME:	DATE:
Purpose of visit (Previously agreed)	
Links with the School Development Plan (How does the visit relate to a priority in the School Development Plan?)	
Observations and comments (e.g. what you saw; what you learned; what you would like clarified; how long the visit lasted)	
Any key issues arising for the governing body (e.g. the way resources are allocated; the way the school communicates; progress in implementing a key policy)	
Action following governing body meeting (Record any action agreed by the governing body with regard to this visit)	
Signed: Governor	
Signed Headteacher	

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Policies: a guide for school governors and headteachers

- Things you might consider when visiting a classroom – relate this to the focus of the visit and in your discussions with the Headteacher/SLT or member of staff
- Relationship between staff and pupils
- Relationships between pupils
- Variety of teaching styles
- Availability and role of support staff
- Behaviour and attitude of pupils — does this match the policy, are they attentive, encouraged, motivated, listening, questioning, responding, rewarded?
- Enjoyment and enthusiasm of both staff and pupils
- How the pupils are grouped
- How different abilities are catered for
- Children’s work
- Displays, is the school attractive
- Ethos — the atmosphere and values that are evident (are high expectations, encouragement, praise, equality of opportunity apparent?)
- Environment and working conditions, what is the school like to work in? is this a good place to work and play? What are the good points? What can be improved
- Quality and quantity of equipment and resources

Suggested questions for Governor Visits

Performance of Pupils

Which year groups, subjects and groups of pupils get the best and worst results and why, and how does this relate to the quality of teaching across the school?

What is your strategy for improving the areas of weakest performance as well as standards for all children , including the least and most able, those with SEN , those receiving free school meals, boys and girls, those of a particular ethnicity, and any who are currently under achieving?

How will we know if your approach is working?

Quality of teaching

Have we got the right staff and the right development and reward arrangements?

What is the schools approach to implementation of pay reform and performance related pay, and if appropriate, is it compliant with the most up to date version of the School Teachers’ Pay and Conditions Document?

Wellbeing

Is this a happy school with a positive learning culture?

What is our track record on attendance, behaviour and bullying?

Are safeguarding procedures in place?

How good is our wider offer to pupils – are we offering a good range of sports, arts and voluntary activities?

Is school food healthy and popular?

Do we listen to what pupils and parents are telling us?

What are you doing to address any current issues, and how will we know if this is working?

EYFS

What is the provision for EYFS?

What are the baseline judgements like when children start school?

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What is your feel for this cohort – above, in line with, below average?

What are you doing about this?

What are your resources like?

Foundation Subjects

What is the curriculum offer here?

What is the percentage of time spent on each subject?

What progression do pupils makes?

What skills are pupils using?

What are you specifically doing for the less and more abled children?